



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE
A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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Six school districts show exceptional commitment to student health

November 18, 2005 (Seattle) — At a time when childhood obesity is on the rise, six school districts in Washington State have shown an exceptional commitment to improving nutrition and fitness for their students.

These districts from around the state, in urban and rural communities alike, all went beyond the minimum state requirements to develop nutrition and physical activity policies that are models for other districts.

All are winners of the School Board Challenge award.

The Children's Alliance and Action for Healthy Kids will recognize the winning six districts at the annual conference of the Washington State School Directors Association on Nov. 18, 2005. Port Angeles School District, North Thurston Public Schools, and St. John-Endicott Cooperative School District will receive \$5,000 each. Mt. Vernon School District, Ellensburg School District and Vancouver School District will receive honorable mention awards of \$1,000 each. The awards will be presented by Senator Kohl-Welles, the prime sponsor of SB 5436 which required school districts in Washington to adopt a nutrition and physical activity policy by August 2005.

"Through their efforts, these districts have demonstrated that any school district in our state can make a real difference in the health of students if they make a true commitment," said Shelley Curtis, nutrition outreach and food policy manager for the Children's Alliance. "These districts have gone above and beyond the minimum by engaging students and the community, adopting strong policies and ensuring they get implemented."

Winning school districts were selected from 25 applications throughout the state for their commitment to improving the school nutrition and physical activity environment. August was the state's deadline for all Washington school districts to adopt nutrition and physical activity policies. To reward school districts that developed exemplary policies, a group of public and private partners led by the Children's Alliance issued a School Board Challenge and selected award recipients in early November. Funding for the awards was provided

by the Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, Access to Healthy Foods Coalition, Washington State Dairy Council, Children's Alliance and industry partners.

The districts being recognized made outstanding efforts to involve students and the community in the policy development and implementation process, and to connect with state and/or local efforts to improve the health and fitness of Washington residents. Samples of new nutrition and physical education policies can be found on the [Healthy Schools in Washington](http://www.healthyschoolswa.org) Web site (<http://www.healthyschoolswa.org>).

Schools are an important player in addressing the growing childhood obesity problem in the United States. One in 10 young people in Washington are significantly overweight, according to the 2004 Healthy Youth Survey.

"Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in our state and the nation, and it has become a critical issue among children," said Ruth Abad, co-chair of Washington State Action for Healthy Kids and a health educator with the Washington State Department of Health. "We know that being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions. Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity are important factors that contribute to our children becoming overweight."

The 2004 Health Youth Survey also found that high school students who consume empty calories by drinking two or more sodas daily are more likely to be overweight. Most (90 percent) have easy access to other unhealthy snack foods at school, and only about a quarter of Washington teens eat fruits and vegetables five or more times a day. According to the 2004 School Health Education Profile, about 15 percent of schools shorten the student lunch period in an attempt to squeeze in more time for instruction – which can encourage students to find fast ways around the cafeteria line.

Improving access to healthier foods and physical activity are part of the [Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/NutritionPA/default.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/NutritionPA/default.htm>).

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For more than twenty years, the Children's Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington. To learn more about the Children's Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org